

## Abby Heller-Burnham and Andrew Wyeth



Abby Heller-Burnham and Andrew Wyeth are both painters associated with the Philadelphia area. Heller-Burnham's "Frozen Warnings" and Wyeth's "Christina's World" share a concern with open spaces, negative spaces, and the spatial dimensions of human consciousness. What is most striking in the contrast between the two, is that Heller-Burnham manages to work into her narrative a sexualized element; the two figures in the painting being a young man and a young woman. Both Christina and the two figures Heller-Burnham represents are set in a bleakly desolate, pastoral landscape; Wyeth's is a scene which could be spring or autumn, Heller-Burnham's is decidedly and defiantly wintry. But because Heller-Burnham also builds in a level of sexuality, her painting seems, in a contradictory way, warmer and less forbiddingly solipsistic than Wyeth's (the solipsism being both in Wyeth and in his Christina), more attuned to depths and dimensions of humanistic interest and representation. The two compositions are strikingly similar enough that Heller-Burnham was clearly thinking of her fellow Philadelphian when she painted "Frozen Warnings"; if, ultimately, her painting is richer, it is because her two characters are involved in a more complex narrative than Christina is; both dealing with the interiorized harsh landscape of their relationship and the harsh physical landscape, while Christina is more one-dimensionally focused on outward, exteriorized forms, bleakly desolate but simple.

